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Canada. Statistics
Mail order business

1930

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CENSUS OF MERCHANDISING AND SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS, 1931

Mail Order Business, 1930.

The total value of mail order sales reported by retail establishments in Canada for the year 1930 was \$77,838,400. This total was made up of sales reported by the following groups of stores:-

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| General Merchandise Stores (including mail order houses) | \$ 71,172,200 |
| Apparel and Clothing Stores | 1,623,400 |
| Building Material Stores | 757,700 |
| Food Stores | 355,200 |
| Furniture and Household Appliance Stores | 242,800 |
| Country General Stores | 120,700 |
| Automotive Stores | 37,000 |
| Jewellery Stores | 464,400 |
| Office, Store and School Furniture and Equipment Dealers | 857,400 |
| Book Stores | 174,900 |
| Seeds, Bulbs and Nursery Stock Stores | 190,400 |
| Other Retail Stores | 1,828,800 |
| Service Establishments | 13,500 |
| TOTAL : | \$ 77,838,400 |

The greater part of the mail order business reported for the Census of Merchandising and Service Establishments was handled by the mail order divisions of the large department store organizations in Canada. According to figures which have recently been published for some of the larger mail order departments, mail order sales in Canada have been declining from 1926. An index based on the figures available shows the following trend:-

Index of Mail Order Sales
(1924 = 100)

| | |
|------------|-----|
| 1924 | 100 |
| 1925 | 108 |
| 1926 | 110 |
| 1927 | 109 |
| 1928 | 106 |
| 1929 | 92 |
| 1930 | 75 |
| 1931 | 65 |
| 1932 | 55 |
| 1933 | 56 |

The mail order sales of \$77,838,400 reported for 1930 were 2.8 per cent of the total retail merchandise trade in Canada for that year. The mail order sales reported, however, do not cover the entire mail order

business conducted in Canada as some stores do not keep account of small transactions by mail and some wholesale firms do a mail order business with individuals. A few manufacturers also make mail order sales. The amount of retail mail order business not reported is probably very small in comparison with the total of \$77,838,400 given above.

While the mail order sales formed only 2.8 per cent of the total retail merchandise trade in Canada, they formed an important part of the business of department and general merchandise stores. The mail order sales of this group were \$71,172,200. The total sales of the general merchandise group were \$449,292,500, of which mail order sales were \$71,172,200 or 15.8 per cent.

The United States Census of Distribution for the year 1929 secured figures for the business of mail order houses (catalog only), while figures for the Census of Merchandising are for the mail order business of all stores. However, as the bulk of the mail order business in both countries is handled by the mail order houses, it is safe to make a comparison of the results. In the United States, mail order houses handled 1.04 per cent of the total retail merchandise trade, compared with 2.8 per cent in Canada. In the general merchandise group alone, mail order houses in the United States handled 6.9 per cent of the total business, compared with 15.8 per cent in Canada. The relatively greater role played by mail order houses in Canada, compared with the United States, is probably due to the fact that merchandising developments have proceeded further in the United States than in Canada. Although mail order houses make considerable use of price appeal in securing patronage, other factors have also played important parts. Where the population is scattered over wide areas, as it is in many parts of Canada, it is not possible for country stores to stock the wide range of commodities demanded for modern life. The mail order house thus enables rural dwellers to choose from a variety of goods in much the same way as is possible for persons living in large cities. The development of modern highway systems and the opportunities afforded for shopping in towns that are strategically located to serve a wide territory provided with good roads are leading people in rural communities to buy at first hand rather than by catalog. This change in purchasing habits is reflected in the index of mail order sales already given which shows that mail order business declined as motor transportation advanced. While the depression has reduced all business very considerably, mail order sales reached their peak some years prior to the depression.



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